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A Pair of Crutches and a Message of Caring

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(NO COMMENTS)

By Cmdr. Wayne M. Haddad, Deputy Chaplain of Navy Medicine



So, what does a month dedicated to suicide prevention actually mean, and how can chaplain's help provide support to their families and civilians?

I remember walking into a safety stand-down at my last command, a medical training facility and overhearing a Sailor joke with friends.

"If I attend one more suicide prevention brief, I think I am going to KILL myself."

Even though macabre humor, I smiled because I related to the Sailor's statement. It would be my 6th mandatory suicide training in the past month—yes six, not because I was a chaplain, but because I had just reported to the command. From Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), command indoctrination, Military Health System (MHS) Learn, Navy Pride and



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Professionalism, the list went on and on. Suicide prevention and awareness was everywhere.

It would be my 6th mandatory suicide training in the past month— yes six, not because I was a chaplain, but because I had just reported to the command. (U.S. Navy photo by MCSN Caine Storino)

So, what does a month dedicated to suicide prevention actually mean, and how can chaplain's help prevent suicides, a very real, critical and important concern for the military, their families and civilians?



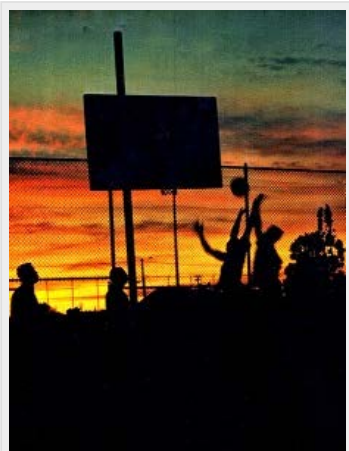
Hope, good relationships, self-care, faith, taking one day at a time, confidence is all part of face to face interactions.

Chaplains have an open door policy, where an individual is invited to sit with another person and honestly express their concerns and feelings. This personable encounter is hard for a typical PowerPoint to communicate. Hope, good relationships, self-care, faith, taking one day at a time, confidence is all part of face to face interactions. Perhaps suicide prevention is as simple as real people with real, authentic concern showing com-passion (with passion) for those with whom they work and serve. As one leader put it: “break the silence and start the conversation”.

When I was stationed at Parris Island, serving alongside a number of Navy medical professionals, I was tasked with the suicide prevention portion of an almost ad hoc safety stand-down. I was given one day to prepare a suicide prevention vignette. Perplexed, I remember scratching my head and turning to Webster’s Dictionary, for what was it called again – a vignette? Defined as a brief evocative description, account, or episode? Were they asking me to act out a scene? I was never even in

the high school drama club. Then it hit me, or actually the command’s care team Religious Program Specialist (RP) did.

Well, the RP had recently got “hit” hard, not in training or combat, but on the basketball court. His leg was in a cast and he was on crutches, and was just what I needed to get the job done. Shortly before my suicide training vignette was scheduled to take place I pre-staged the RP in the auditorium that was packed with all the other Sailors and Marines. I then figuratively speaking, stole his crutches. I’m not sure what article violation this falls under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, but I entered the auditorium hobbling along on the crutches.



Well, the RP had recently got “hit” hard, not in training or combat, but on the basketball court. (U.S. Navy photo by Steven Van Der Werff)

The audience’s reaction was remarkable. By the time I was front and center no less than 10 individuals had asked me what happened. In fact, when I fumbled and dropped my folder and presentation, several Marines and a Navy Doc scrambled to help me. I thought the Doc was going to throw me into a wheelchair or have me admitted immediately to Naval Hospital Beaufort. The audience was captivated. The silence was broken when I started talking and then casually propped the crutches on the podium mid-sentence, and then continued to talk and walk – unscathed, no limp, no pain, no worry.

A collective gasp followed then outright

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We are all first responders. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 James Foehl)

laughter. They knew it was no miracle; they had been duped, taken and fooled by the chaplain of all people. Yes, even the Doc, Sergeant Major and Commanding Officer. My point was quite simple, we do well helping others and asking what is wrong rather easily when confronted by someone's physical injuries, but often struggle with how to help if someone is emotionally, morally or personally

hurt. We find it hard to "break the silence". To this day, I still run into those who remember that brief and my simple message of caring.

We are ALL first responders—Every Sailor, Every Day...picking up someone on crutches or helping someone in distress is something we must always do. It's not something that can be learned from a PowerPoint. It happens when we help others and ourselves to have a happy life and to live it to the fullest.

To learn more about chaplain support visit: www.chaplain.navy.mil or <http://chaplaincorps.navylive.dodlive.mil>. Check out www.suicide.navy.mil for additional suicide prevention information and [I Pledge to ACT](#), a web-based effort encouraging Sailors, families and members of the Navy community to take steps to build personal resilience, support shipmates and intervene if they notice signs of distress. The pledge is completely anonymous and is available to all.

For comments or questions please contact wayne.haddad@med.navy.mil

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